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Subject: Preparation for Death.

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A Weekly Publication

OF

SERMONS

PREACHED BY

HENRY WARD BEECHER.

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HENRY WARD BEECHER.

PLYMOUTH PULPIT.

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PREPARATION FOR DEATH.

"Take ye heed, watch and pray; for ye know not when the time is."—MARK XIII. 33.

If any man has ever taken a leaf-bud into his hand, and examined it, he has found that while it seemed like a unit—a simple thing in itself—it contained within the first leaf another one; and that within the second there was a third, and on so all the way through, a whole summer's growth being compressed into a form scarcely bigger than the head of a pin.

So it is, as Lord Bacon says, with prophecy, which has a kind of "springing and germinant accomplishment." For, while the words of our Master often seem to have reference to a near and present thing, they are also made, otherwhere, and in the same discourse, to apply to a more remote one, and to one still more remote. You shall find, in one prophecy, wrapped up, like so many leaves in one bud, declarations which respect the death of the individual, the destruction of Jerusalem, and the final day of judgment—the great settling-day of this moral experiment of the universe. And all of them lie in a line. Being of one analogy, having moral similarities, they are grouped together. And the same prophecy means the first, the second, and the third.

So it is with the passage from which I have made this selection today. While the context shows—as especially do the parallel passages in other gospels—that the Saviour was speaking of the near approach of the destruction of Jerusalem; yet, at the same time, almost without any possibility of discriminating the points, he shades off, in his teaching, to the great and final judgment. And yet he applies both of these things to the individual fear and the individual fidelity, and makes it an argument for every man to prepare for death.

In Matthew, particularly, there is a group of pictures parabolic. I read some of them to you as part of the opening service.

The first is the picture of a man who had possession in his house, and who, if he had known at what hour the thief would come, would

SUNDAY MORNING, Feb. 27, 1870. LESSON: MATT. XXIV. 42—51; XXV. 1—13. HYMNS (Plymouth Collection): Nos. 162, 142, 346.

have watched. Human life, all that is valuable to a man, all that it is worth his while to save, is like a house, with its precious commodities and treasures in it; and Death is like a thief; and the householder, if he is wise, and has any hint that a thief is coming on a given night, will watch, and be ready for him; so men should watch against that thief Death. But the householder did not know that the thief was coming, and so the thief stole on, and peered into the window, and listened, and raised the sash gently, and thrust himself in, and went to the ascertained place where the treasure was hidden, and took it, and disappeared; and then it was too late for the householder to watch. His treasure was gone. And so, by implication, the Saviour says to every one of us, "Prepare for Death before he comes; for it will be too late to prepare when he has come."

Or, to take another figure, the master goes to a far country on a journey of pleasure or of business, and leaves his house and goods in the hands of his servants, and charges them to take care. And, as is sometimes the case, as soon as the master's eye is off from them, the servants, unfaithful to their trust, and determined to have a good time, now that the master is gone, conspire together, saying, "Nobody will know what we do; nobody will hold us to accountability." And, not dreaming that he is coming back so soon, thinking that his absence will be prolonged for days and days yet, by his business, they go on in their hilarity; and they are in a drunken debauch, and are quarreling, those that are stronger beating those that are weaker. And at that very moment in comes the lord, unexpectedly, and catches them in that gross abuse of his trust, in that outrageous infidelity to their duty. It is too late, then, for them to watch, and make ready for his return. There is no excuse for their conduct; so they are bundled out, all of them. Not one remains. And our Saviour says, "Watch. Your Master is absent. He is coming. If you are all of you wild with dissipated pleasure, abusing reason, abusing conscience, abusing life itself, he will come for you at an hour that you think not of. Be sober; be vigilant; be ready. Let him come when he pleases, by day or by night; and whenever he comes, let him find the household of your heart ready for him."

Then there is the third picture. It is of the marriage feast, or, rather, festival—for, among the Jews, weddings occupied two or three days and nights, and sometimes fourteen days and nights, of rejoicing. It was the custom of the bridegroom, taking some of his companions, to go to the house of the father of the bride; and, so soon as the procession set out from his father's house, or from his house, many of his companions were prepared to go out into the street and join the procession, sometimes throwing flowers, and always carrying torches. And

when they had come to the house of festivity, and gone in, the door was closed, and they spent their hours in social enjoyment.

Our Master says of the ten virgins who were thus waiting to join the bridal procession, that five of them were ready, and five of them were not ready. So, when the procession hove in sight, and the cry came down the street, "Behold! the bridegroom cometh!" and they rose to go out to meet him, half had no oil with which to light their torches. And they begged the others to lend them of their oil. And the others said, "Prepare your own torches; we have only enough oil for ourselves." And they went out to get some oil, and while they were gone the procession went on, and entered the house, and the door was closed. And when they came, afterwards, and knocked, they were rejected. It was too late.

All these pictures bear on this one point—timely preparation to meet God in the other life. All of them have one drift, one meaning; and that is, that men should make their whole life a sober, watchful preparation for the hour of death, and the consequences of it; and that it is disastrous, that it is a piece of temerity and of wickedness, for any man to defer preparing for death until death comes.

It is this subject that I am going to talk to you about this morning—leaving your preparation for the other life until death draws near to you.

Men do not love to think of Death, because they are not on good terms with him. They resort to forgetfulness. They occupy themselves, often, intensely. They rush into pleasures. They count him to be no kind companion, and no pleasant friend, that will insist upon reminding them of dying and death. It is a gloomy thing. All the offices of death are gloomy; and they are made more so by the heathen practices of Christian communities.

Now, death is not in itself anything terrible, as a mere physical event. Most persons die with as little pain as a child goes to sleep; and all the suffering which precedes death is so little in the majority of instances that if it were all summed up and put upon a man who is alive and well, he would be ashamed to shed a tear, or to shrink from the bearing of it. Death in and of itself is merciful. It was not meant that men should be crowded out of life as through a door. When men are prepared to die, nature is as gracious to them in dying, as to an apple, when it is ripe and ready to fall from the bow. The stem itself prepares, as a part of its ripeness, to let go; so that when the least breath of wind, after the moistening by the dew in the night, shakes the apple, it falls easily to the ground.

We do not cling to the bough of life very tenaciously. We do not need to be torn from it by rude handling. Dying is not a thing spe-

cially to be dreaded. No man ever has the toothache in good earnest, no man ever has the rheumatism or neuralgia, that he does not suffer every hour more pain than dying inflicts upon men ordinarily. There are exceptional cases, but this is the general rule. Death is a thing, therefore, not to be dreaded as a physical experience.

In regard to death as the interruption of our plans and affections, it is a thing, certainly, more painful, and to be apprehended with less composure; because death does overhang men in the midst of their love, and in the midst of their schemes; and they have seen among their neighbors what disasters have followed it. One prophesies, and asks, "What will become of my children? What will become of my estate? What will become of these mighty interests which have devolved upon me, and which my hands have controlled and guided?" So that there is a reason more worthy than the fear of pain, why men do not like to think of death.

And yet, even this, philosophy, without any consideration of religion, might very much ameliorate. For, since the world began, has it ever been found that a man died whose place could not be supplied? Has the world mourned because a family mourned? Have children that have lost the guiding parent not been able to find their way into life, and through life? Nature is made so large and so bountiful, and the economy of God's providence is such, that, after all, those who think that they are so important to their estate, to their business, to their families, over-estimate. To be sure, if they should die, the household would not be carried on as they are carrying it on; but it would not be destroyed. A man says, "Oh! let me compass sea and land, and bring home what my golden net would fain enclose; let me live till I can make my children as princes, warding off all care from them, and supplying them with the means of all culture and pleasure; let me live till things are consolidated, and then I can leave my household without anxiety for their welfare." But the Lord strikes down this man, and he dies in the midst of his plans, and unfaithful agents scatter, taking what they can lay their hands on, and executors take the rest, and his children are left, just as he was, to themselves, and to the providence of God. And they grow up energetic, industrious, careful and frugal, as they would not have done if they had been left to be pampered and slain by the dissolving power of an overplus of riches.

Besides, we are not as necessary as we think. The sun will come up to-morrow if you do die. The stars will shine if you are not here to see them. Summer will come if your plough lies still. The world is not made to turn on you as a pivot. You occupy a very small place. Your little will, and your little purposes, scarcely crease the great orb of affairs. And no man is so necessary that of the stones God cannot

raise up one to take his place. The work that you have in undivided hands, God scatters and divides up among a hundred.

So men over-estimate their importance, and think that death is a terrible thing because they are conceited in regard to their relations here in this world.

But the true significance of death lies in the fact that it brings men into final moral relations with God; that it brings moral character and conduct to a final test; that it brings men into judgment for all the deeds done in the body—for every word; for every thought; for every habit; for every element of character. At death men enter into the presence of God. There is a settling of their estate; and their estate follows their nature and character. They that have done good rise to honor and glory and immortality; and those that have done evil sink to shame and woe. That is a reason why men dread death; and it is a good reason for dreading it. But it is not a good reason for not thinking about it. It is not only a good reason why men should not love to cherish in their bosom the thought of death, which is so full of fear, but it is a good reason why they should take away fear from the thought of death. For, death may come to us either dark, revengeful, prophesying mischief, or it may come as the coming of the Son of Man, full of hope and promise and cheer.

Every consideration should induce men to give this point of their being the most profound thought; but it has, in fact, the least of our thought. Men do not willingly entertain thoughts of it, because it is painful, and they are not prepared to let that pain work in them a salutary result.

Now let us consider, as calm and prudent men, the full effect and the true character of deferring the preparation for death until the dying hour.

1. To thus defer this preparation is to deprive life itself of one of its chief steadying elements. There is nothing that we need more than ballasting. There is nothing that we need more than some form of earnestness which shall give cohesion and depth and power to the whole course of our lives. We tend to run after follies. We tend to be diverted from the highest good. We are tempted and dazzled by fripperies. And death is a solemn undertone which never dies out of the air.

They who live near the shore of the sea know that even in a calm the surge moans upon the beach. No wind comes, that the plash does not grow louder. And storms thunder on the shore. And those who live near the sea learn to miss, if they go away from it, the solemn undertone of the great singing, sighing ocean.

So death, to the contemplative mind, is, as it were, the great other

world beating on this. And the thought of it keeps in one's soul a sense of one's life—of its greatness, its reality, the consequences of it; and so it steadies men, and keeps them to their work, to their thought, to their conscience, and to their reason.

A wise foresight of death changes the emphasis of experience in this life. He who forethinks and prepares, will find that he has made wise provision not simply against the contingency of the future, but for the exigencies of the present. For the preparations for death, of which I shall speak more by and by, will relieve us from the threat of ten thousand cares and ills, and ten thousand dissipations. Just so soon as a man measures his history, or his experience, by infinite measures, how he puts to shame the common rules of society!

There is one solitary little proverb that gets a living among men, which is very good. When one frets over a small thing, men are accustomed to say, "Well, it will be all the same a hundred years hence!" That is a sort of blind or homely way of coming at this same thing.

If men were accustomed to measure things by their value to them in their whole scope of being—and that it is to think of death in these ways—a thousand things which torment them would be found to be mere midges. Men think that they are stung to death when mosquitoes sting them, in moral things. Men vex and harrass and annoy themselves by mere dust. The vast things—those things that involve in them everlasting consequences—they do not feel. The emphasis is wrong. Men acuminate the things which are small and inconsequential; and they leave blunted and undiscovered things which are vast and terrible in their outworkings. So that if a man be living with a wise forethought of life, and the termination of life, he will not be so apt to be inflamed by ambition, as if he thought this life was everything. And wealth will not be so tempting to him. It will not be any less a power: it will be more a power, but a different one, working for a different part of his mind. Pleasure will not fly away because a man must needs die, but it will answer a different end to one who feels that he will ere long die. He who feels that death opens the gate to another and higher state of existence, will look upon all parts of life, not with indifference, but with a different emphasis, and with a different meaning.

A wise foresight of death also gives unity, consistence, and steady purpose to the whole of our life, now scattered into details, or gathered together like a sand-heap in which the particles are in juxtaposition, but not in union. He who thinks from day to day that death is but a hand-breadth; that death comes to terminate this life, and then begins the other, the eternal, and the real life, cannot but find, not only that it will

minister to wisdom and prudence, but that it will soften many hard places, and relieve many sharp sufferings.

If one thinks wisely of death, not only will it not be a fear and a terror, but it will be a guardian angel. There is no thought sweeter to those that believe in Christ, than the thought that He will bring them from the dead, even as He was raised from the dead. There is no thought in which, with more joy, men bathe their fevered brow, than the thought, "Ere long I shall die; I shall go forth from this struggle —from this strife of tongues; from this bitterness; from this injustice; from this partial life; from this unmanliness. It will be but a little while before I shall go forth and be at rest."

2. Living without conscious preparation for death is a risk which neither prudence nor self-respect should allow. Judging by any way that men treat themselves, it is not prudent to put to peril and risk all the tremendous issues of dying. No man would put his affections to such a risk. No man does. A man guards himself with a wise providence of the future. No man puts his affections as they are involved in the family to such peril. He is perpetually forethinking; working to provide against evils; making preparation to-day and this year for to-morrow and next year. And it is wise—so wise that it ought to apply to the whole of our existence, as well as to a part. No man should allow his interest, his ambition, his property, to go without wise foresight and preparation. And no man, certainly, should treat that which is unspeakably more precious—his own immortality—without any consideration of the future. He that will not suffer his house to go uninsured—should he suffer his Father's house in heaven to be in peril to him? He that would not suffer his taste, or his commonest affections, to go without being clothed and guarded with foresight and caution and fidelity—should he permit his whole nature to be launched upon the future without a thought or a preparation? Is that wise? Is it prudent?

Still more, there is a principle of self-respect involved in this matter. The more worthy one thinks himself to be, the less can he afford to leave death to hazards. If it be that death divides; if one living right goes into joy and glory, and one living wrong goes into shame and punishment; if death is the point of division between a man's nobler life and his disgraceful life, no man that has self-respect can afford to leave the chances of his future being to the hour of death. You cannot afford to throw yourself away; and the more you are naturally proud and self-respecting, the more profound is your moral consciousness worthy of your being, the less can you afford to put it in peril on the threshold of the other world. No man so much as he who thinks highly of himself, of his power, of his capacity, of his recipiency, can af-

ford to leave anything to chance in respect to that great, that rich, that infinite, that eternal world. No man can afford to go into the future life an enemy of God. No man who believes in himself here, can afford to be bankrupt there. No man can afford to be a beggar, no man can afford to be a vagabond, forever. No man can afford to be a culprit in the world to come. And no man has any right to leave his condition there to chance.

3. There is a view which will have weight with men who are just, and who are honestly seeking to guide themselves by principles of honor. It is the ignoring, the dishonoring of God's love, his will and his commands, all one's life, and then, at death, for fear, or for the sake of interest, rushing into a settlement. It is better to enter "so as by fire" than to perish; but where one has his life and his reason before him, it is a shame for him to enter the kingdom of heaven "so as by fire"—to escape, as it were, into the salvation of Jesus Christ.

We have no doubt as to this matter of honor between man and man. If you were at odds with a neighbor, and you were prosperous, and he was prosperous, and disaster overcame you, you would be ashamed, in the hour of your disaster and your weakness, to go to that neighbor and make up with him, because a great trouble had come upon you. You would be ashamed to do at such a time what you would not do in your prosperity and strength, for the sake of the benefit you might derive from it.

Or, put it in another form. A child is reprobate, and breaks away from home, and squanders all he can get, and becomes a wreck and a wretch, and apparently is to be disowned. He hears, at last, after years and years of dissipation, that his father is weakening and drawing near to death; and he scents the opportunity, and rushes home, and professes repentance and reformation, in order that his father may reconstruct his will, and leave him a part of his estate. What would you think of a child that should do that? What would you think of a child that should deliberately calculate upon it, and say in himself, "The old man has oftentimes, with tears in his eyes, warned me against my gambling companions; but there is time enough yet. He is rich, and I want a part of his money, and I know his heart, and I mean to come in for a share by-and-by. I am going to have my pleasure; I am going to eat, drink and be merry; I am going to have my royal debauch with my companions; and when I see that the old man is about *pegging out* I will go home and reform; because I do not mean to lose that property; I am going to enjoy myself as I please, and have that too?" What would you think of a child that should say that, and then keep his eye on his father, and calculate his chances, and run scuttling home just in time to get his name put in the will right,

in order that he might have the property? What name is there in any language that is adequate to express your feelings toward such baseness as that?

And yet, are there not in my hearing men that are living precisely so with respect to their Father who is in heaven? Are there not men here who are saying to themselves, "I am going to have the way of my pride, and my ambition, and my lust; I am going to live as I please; I am going to seek my own delights; but I cannot go out of life as I am; so by-and-by I am going to repent"? Oh! you mean pensioner! Oh! you detestable creature! Do you mean to suck all that is palatable to you out of God's summer, and make no acknowledgment to him for his bounty as long as you can help it? Do you deliberately calculate, "I will serve iniquity, I will dishonor love, I will forswear allegiance, I will use myself for myself, during the best part of my life—for God is good, and will not cut me down; and by-and-by I will, when I have some monition of approaching death, repent, and make a lucky turn; and slip into the kingdom. I will have all the good of this world, and all the good of the other world too!" Is that your calculation? Did you ever think whether you were living on principles of honor or not? Are you not living on principles that between man and man are so detestable that you would not look one in the face who should practice them toward his fellows? And how must angels look upon men who do not hesitate to do toward God that which they would be ashamed to do, and would scorn to do, toward each other? And yet, there is many and many a man who has calculated his whole life on that chance.

Young man, you have said, "For one, I am not going to be worried and fretted by this thing any longer. I am going to throw it behind my back. I have entered upon a business career; and I am going to run through that career. Religion would check me in my course; it would stand in the way of my doing what I mean to; and I will not trouble myself about it now. But by-and-by, when I have accomplished my objects in life, I am going to give attention to preparation for death." There is your horoscope. There are the principles on which you are living. And yet, if I charge you with total depravity, how your brow wrinkles! You have taken the noblest and best of all relations, and put them on principles so odious and hateful that a man cannot be tolerated who acts upon them in his dealings with his fellow men; and yet you expect to go out of this life and be happy in the other life! Be your own judge in this thing.

4. There are prudential considerations of a very solemn nature which one should employ. Those who think that they shall prepare for death in the last hour of life, ought to consider some of their chances.

As a matter of fact, more than one half that die in this world die without consciousness. Not alone of those that die by accident, by sudden stroke, but of those that die by disease, more than one half die under a cloud, so that they have no use of their reason. And among these are many who, all their life-long, said, "I am not prepared for death; I know that very well; but I hope to have timely notice, and I mean to prepare before I die." Hundreds, thousands, multitudes, have reserved to the last hours of life a preparation for death; and when those last hours came reason had gone, and they went out of life as men asleep, when the ship sinks, go out of life, drowned without a cry.

A large portion of the residue are by disease so far disabled, benumbed, relaxed, weakened, that it is quite in vain to attempt much instruction with them. One of the piteous things which a minister sees who is called to exhort the dying, is the calmness which they exhibit. I have been called to the bedsides of men whom I know to have been dissipated, and in no ordinary degree wicked, whose reason, though it remained, was, as it were, under a charm. I would talk with them, and they would admit everything. They saw everything. They felt nothing. Sensibility seemed to have died in its fountains, and they were like men who were in a dream. They saw the future; they believed in the future; they believed in God, in judgment, and in punishment; and they believed that they themselves were drifting right on to the shore, a wreck; and yet, it affected neither fear, nor hope, nor remorse. There was a perfect insensibility in them. And so they died. And of those that die with their reason, of those that die rational, I think it may be said that one half die with such a lowered tone of sensibility, with the nervous system so impaired, that they are utterly incapable of making any preparation for death. At the very best there be few who are capable of it.

And of the residue, how few are there who in that hour can, with any deliberation, with any discrimination, with any ready command of faith, with any clear apprehension of life, throw themselves into the arms of the Lord Jesus Christ in any such way as to leave a reasonable and well-grounded hope to those who are left behind, that they have made a good exchange of worlds!

To be sure, there are some chances—chances enough to make it wise for every man to be exhorted. There is hope even in the eleventh hour. There is hope for some. And yet the hope is so slender that it seems to me he who is in life and health is infatuated who reserves his immortality to the miserable chances of a death-bed repentance. There is no standard which we employ in respect to our common affairs, there is no way of measuring prudence and honor, which does not sit in

condemnation upon those who reserve for the last hour all their preparation for the kingdom of God.

Whichever way you look at it, and the more you look at it; whether you accept the importance, the worth, of a man's own soul, or the claims of God, his rightful commands; whether you consider the effect of a timely preparation upon this life or on the issues of the other; whether you take into account the glory of the heavenly estate, or the misery of those who are lost—whichever way you look at it, no man can justify himself in the court either of his conscience or his reason, for letting alone a preparation for death until the last moment. And yet, that is just what every man is doing who, though he is living from day to day under self-condemnation, is doing nothing.

This subject ought to come very near to the young, because it will take away one of those fears and one of those distresses which are so incident to the young. How vividly I remember my boyhood. Oh, that old church bell! What woe it has smitten into my sensitive soul! Hearing that old bell toll for some one's death was enough to give me horrors for the day and for the week. How the thought of the other life, and of my want of preparation for it, brooded over me like a hideous dream in the night! And, at last, when I found who lived in the other life; when I found that it was my Saviour and my Friend; when I found that he had taught me how to love him, and that in his arms was salvation, and that death was slain and destroyed, and that I was saved in him, how it was as if one, being in a far frozen zone, had gone to the temperate zones, or the tropics! And for scores of years, dying has had no fear for me. It has long since ceased to have any banners of threat and warning in the sky for me. It is better to die than to live, for him who is prepared to die. If I wished to send a child of mine into the world equipped for the battle of life, and wished him the highest joy and the greatest peace, I would say to him, Clear the terror out of your future. See that you have a right to die with a crown on your head as a son of God, and not as a miscreant and a culprit. Prepare to meet thy God in youth. Trust him. Love him. It will take away fear from all your life, and make that life better worth having—more cheerful, more joyful.

Do not think that in order to prepare now for death, a man must sit, as it were, among tombstones. Do not think that I call you to a gloomy life. Do not think that I call you to meditation on funerals, and coffins, and graves, and skulls, and cross-bones, and hideous insignia of death. Do not think that I call you to sadness and sepulchral ghastliness. I do not call you to these things. I do not seek to fill your minds with terror; but to present death to you in such a light that it shall have no terror to you. Live by faith of God, give your

heart to Christ, take him to be your personal Saviour, yield, as a child, everything to him as a Father, and you will have no occasion to fear death. Death has no terror; no blackness; no memorials of evil; no threat. It is as sweet as flowers are. It is as blessed as bird-singing in spring is. I never hear of the death of any one who is ready to die, that my heart does not sing like a harp. I am sorry for those that are left behind, but not for those that have gone before.

It is always a sad day in autumn, to me, when I see the change that comes over nature. Along in August, the birds are all still, and you would think that there were not any left; but if you go out into the fields you find them feeding in the trees, and hedges, and everywhere. By-and-by September comes, and they begin to gather together in groups; and anybody that knows what it means knows that they are getting ready to go. And then come the later days of October—the sad, the sweet, the melancholy, the deep days of October. And the birds are less and less. And in November, high up, you see the sky streaked with water-fowl going southward; and strange noises in the night, of these pilgrims of the sky, they shall hear whose ears are attuned to natural history. Birds in flocks, one after another, wing their way to the south. Summer is gone; and I am left behind; but they are happy. And I think I can hear them singing in all those states clear down to the Gulf. They have found where the sun is never cold. With us are frosts, but not with the bird that has migrated.

Oh, mother! my heart breaks with your heart when your cradle is empty; but shall I call back the child? Nay; sooner pluck a star out of heaven than call back that child to this wintry blast. Shall I call back your young and dear and blooming friend? Nay. You are left in some bitterness for a time; but make not a man out of angel again. Let him rejoice.

In all our outlook, and in all our forelook, dying is triumphing. Not any bower of roses is so festooned in June. Not where the jessamine and honeysuckle twine, and lovers sit, is there so fair a sight, so sweet a prospect, as where a soul, in its early years, is flying away out of life, and out of time, through the gate of death—the rosy gate of death; the royal gate of death; the golden gate of death; the pearly gate of death.

It is guilt and fear that blacken dying. Hope and love make it sweeter than being born. And so the day of death is better than the day of birth; and it is better to go to the house of mourning than to the house of feasting. It is really so to those who know it, and put it to proof.

And to the young I say, If you would be happy, do not live with an unsettled account. It is the special boast of some men that they

are out of debt. They reflect upon it with unfeigned satisfaction. It is a source of great happiness to them. And you shall sometimes hear one man say to another, as it were in defiance, "Do I owe you anything, sir?" "I believe not," says the other. "No, sir, nor any other man, thank God! I own my house, and everything I have. I do not owe anybody, and nobody can hurt me." Then there are other men who at every corner they turn expect a hand to grab them. They owe, and cannot pay; and every day they go dodging about, and resort to various shifting devices, to avoid their creditors. And what sort of a life is that? Just such a life as hundreds and thousands of young men are living, who all the time feel that there is a gloom coming down on their joys. Because they know that they are not prepared to die, they are perpetually dreading the future.

Now for pleasure's sake—certainly for honor's sake and duty's sake, but even for pleasure's sake—it is wise that the young should prepare for death while they are yet young, and keep that preparation up all the way through life.

And if it be wise for them, certainly it is wise for those who are advancing in life—those whose days are numbered. There are a great many such before me. There are men here whose years make it right that I should call them my fathers, who have lived scores and scores of years, and who are to day witnesses against themselves, that they have never made any preparation for dying. They think they are honest, and, as the world goes, they are. They are industrious, they are frugal, they are straight as citizens, they are kind as householders, they have a great many virtues; but all of these virtues do not amount to a preparation to meet God, and to dwell with the spirits of just men made perfect. And they know it. They have been for forty years talking about the subject of religion, but they have not advanced one single step toward it; and they are living as far from preparation and from hope as they ever were. But time is dealing with them, and it cannot but be that in a few years the places that now know them will know them no more forever. I appeal to everyone who is going on in life, and who has been years and years thinking of this subject of life and death, whether it is not time for them to change, and change at once. Is there any command that comes home to you, in exhortation, with more affecting earnestness than that of our text?

There are some of you that God is dealing with. There are some of you that cannot rest. Your consciences are sore. Your fears are more faithful to you than you are to yourselves. There are some of you who are living in known sin. There are some of you who, if you could detach yourselves from certain courses, would have nothing to hinder your reconciliation with the Lord Jesus Christ. There are

many of you that are rolling sin as a sweet morsel under your tongue. But you are not happy in it. Is it not strange that men are not detached from their sins by the want of enjoyment? Many and many a man says, "I cannot give up my cup; and yet it makes me wretched." Many a man says, "I cannot give up my illicit life; and yet it is a torment to me all the time." There are those who knowingly give themselves up to dishonesties, impurities, and dissipations of various kinds. Death is coming on step by step. They are dragging themselves literally to the point of disaster. And they reluctate at times. Sometimes they weep, and sometimes they breathe prayers. Yet they do not change. And one after another will drop out of life like men that fall over a precipice so high that we do not hear the report. They will disappear; and friends coming back, will ask, "Where is A.?" and the reply will be, "Oh! he died and was buried twelve months ago." "Where is B.?" "He played out about six months ago." "Where is C.?" "He has taken up lodgings in Greenwood." So men, with these ghastly pleasantries, cover up all their fears, and that greatest event of life—going out of it. And there are men within the sound of my voice who are trembling now, and who know that, above everything else, they need that some hand should take them up, with irresistible power, and put their life where their moral sense is already, and do for them what they are too irresolute to do for themselves.

But the time is short; and if you are to do it for yourselves (as you must; for there is no hand but yours to do it) you need to be in a hurry. *Be ye ready!* To some of you, this, if it is not the last time, is among the last times, that you will enjoy the privileges of the sanctuary. The years are unmerciful, and are bearing you away, beyond preaching, and beyond the solicitude of the Gospel, toward God, and toward the inevitable doom of sin and sinners.

And so I say to you, Oh, my friends!—ye that are living in sin, Prepare to meet your God. He makes haste. The days are going. Watch; be sober; be ready; for in such an hour as ye think not, the Son of man cometh.

And so, as helpless as a child, I have drifted through this subject, and come to the end of it, and done nothing, to my own thought and seeming. I think there is no place where a man feels his helplessness so much as when he stands between two great worlds, and strives to deal with men. There is no fortress that is so inaccessible as the human heart. There is no place where a man feels his skill, his wit, his knowledge, his power, so baffled as when he stands in the presence of a living man, and attempts to lift him out of animalism, and out of sordid passions, and out of worldly moods, into a pure, serene and heav-

enly mood. I shall sooner stand and say to the flowers, "Come forth!" and see the flowers obey my call, than stand in the midst of such a deaf assembly as this, and say to the impure, "Come into purity!" to the hard, "Come into the sweetness of love;" to the suspicious, "Come into simplicity and trust," and to the worldly-minded, "Be ye heavenly-minded, and set your affections on things above, at the right hand of God, where Christ sitteth," and have them do my bidding.

All power is as nothing. Yet I yearn; I long; I strive; I pray. As an ambassador in Christ's stead, I beseech you, be ye reconciled to God. To-day I say to the young, Death loves to riddle; and if you think you are in no danger of dying because you are young, I beseech you, make a pilgrimage to Greenwood, and read the ages. That is a lesson for any man to learn. Take the averages of those ages, and see whether men die young and in the prime of life or not.

I beseech of you (and there is nothing that carries your whole reason and judgment and conscience more than this) do not defer any longer a preparation for dying. It will be an evil hour if you repent on your death-bed. It may be with your reason clouded; it may be amidst tempestuous fears; it may be in an utter apathy. Prepare now; for the best preparation for dying is right living.

To you that are young, to you my fathers, and to you my own equals in age, I come bearing the message of your Master. Heaven waits for you. The joy of heaven may be yours. And all the disasters, all the terrors, of sin and guilt and shame, wait for those that do not turn from their wickedness to God, and witness for life. I stand between the flame and the crown, and cry out to you, *Prepare to meet your God!* For the day makes haste. Your time is short. Your work is great. Do not procrastinate any longer. Begin to-day, in prayer, and consecration, and simplicity, and earnestness, to live a Christian life. And God will be glad, and Christ will rejoice over you, and the Holy Ghost will help and sanctify you.

PRAYER BEFORE THE SERMON.

We thank thee, our Father, that thou hast not clothed thyself with terror; that thou dost not fill the future with fear. We draw near to thee by Him who is called *Saviour, Friend, Redeemer;* and when we are taken by his hand and presented to thee we behold thy name. It is *Father*. We are taught to call thee by this endearing name. And what fear can come with thee? What dread can there be of thee? In thee is refuge and rescue to those that are outside of thee, tossed with fear and with dread. We take refuge as children in our Father's house. We run to thee in every time of fear, that we may be saved. And we rejoice. The more we put thee to proof and trust thee, the more dost thou reveal thyself in our experience, past all doubt, a faithful, covenant-keeping. Every word of thy promise is Yea and Amen. We are all helpless. None of us can do our duty in full. We are sinful, weak, imperfect, stumbling, erring every day and every moment. And all are pensioners of love. It is not to measure out our desert that thou dost give. It is not that we are worthy. It is that thou art generous. It is because thou art that nature of love which delights to give to the unworthy, and by giving make them worthy. Thou dost fill up our deficiency with thy goodness, and bring us very near to thee, because it pleases thee to do these things. This is the royalty of thy heart. Here dost thou love to sit with justice to defend; to love; to draw all thine unto thyself. And when thou dost draw thy sword and smite thine enemies, it is that, being wounded, they may be made whole; that, being slain, they may be brought to life again with a more glorious life. Thou dost seek to subdue thine adversaries by thy grace and by thy mercy; and the goodness of God leads us to repentance. Forbid that we should overthrow all the purposes of thy goodness, and treasure up for ourselves wrath against the day of wrath, and call down upon our heads God's righteous retribution against the wicked. Forbid that our selfishness should refuse thy bounty; that our obstinacy should resist thy sweet persuasion; and that our sordid and secular minds should be unconscious of all that precious treasure which thou dost offer to our faith. O thou that dost bring forth summer out of winter, bring forth, we pray thee, out of our cold and hard hearts the pleasant fruits of righteousness. And grant that the word of truth which shall be spoken to-day, may be spoken with seriousness and earnestness, with simplicity and directness; and grant that the Spirit of God may bear it home to every soul that shall need its special lesson.

Are there those in thy presence that have come up hither burdened in heart? O thou that didst command the morning to come forth from the night again! shine upon the most dark and troubled souls. May they find their way to thee, and, bearing tears, come away with songs. Are there those that are heavily laden? O, may they hear thee saying, Come to me and find rest to your souls. Are there those that have disported themselves in their wild and natural liberty? May they hear God calling them and saying, Take my yoke upon you. Grant, we pray thee, that there may be many who shall look from their trouble to that great joy and peace which thou hast for all troubled souls. Are there any that are thinking of their way, and are dissatisfied with the past, and anxious for the future, and yet dare to hope? Reveal to them this day the pleasant face of Jesus reconciled to them in love, if they are loving and reconciled. And may they hear their Father and their God offering to them full and free forgiveness. Whatever may have been their sins, how long soever they may have been sinning, thy heart is ample enough for full forgiveness to every one. The very chief of sinners may come to thee and live.

Grant, we pray thee, that those who are beginning with feeble steps to tread the royal way, may have the stumbling-blocks taken out of their path. May they find that they are growing stronger. More and more may the light dawn as they travel on toward the celestial gate. May none of them cast away their hope. May none of them count themselves unworthy of eternal life, and go back. May every one press forward toward the Sacred Heart.

We beseech of thee, O Lord our God, that those who labor in holy things may be themselves quickened; that they may be filled more with the Spirit of their Father in heaven.

Oh! grant a blessing to rest upon all the young in this congregation, and those gathered in our Sabbath schools, and in our Bible classes. Sanctify those that teach; and may those that are taught be brought to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ for the salvation of their souls.

We beseech thee that all the influences that go forth from this Church and its various operations, may be to the honor and glory of God. May we be saved from pride and from vanity and from self-indulgence. May we be saved from adulation, and from everything that shall tarnish simplicity and humility and purity and childlikeness before God our Father. Grant that thy people here may be bold to rebuke and to resist iniquity. May they be gentle, and kind, and easy to be entreated by those who are in need. And we pray that more and more bound together by love among themselves, and more and more filled and refilled from the fountain thereof in God, they may walk toward the celestial city, singing as they go, and triumphing ere they meet their foe, and passing as conquerors, crowned and laureled, through death itself; and that they may appear in Zion and before God.

We beseech of thee, that thou wilt bless us all, and that thou wilt bless to us all the dispensations of thy providence. Thou art taking one and another out of our midst. Thou art calling home many from among us. We thank thee for their life, for their victory, for all our faith and gladness for their joy above. How precious are they making the heavens! How many stars now that once we saw not are shining out! How many are there of memories! How many are there of associations! How many are there of blessed chords of love that draw our hearts thither! How shall we realize that great future in which once no man dwelt to us, but which is now made populous! It is the city of our God, and our city. And forth there will come how many, from the gates to greet us—some whom we have helped; some whom we have borne and taught, and now are teaching us to fight our way to them, and so our way to heaven! Grant, O Lord! that this heavenly land may be brought very near to us to-day. May we rejoice in its joys May its overflow come down as the rains from the clouds upon us. May our affections spring up as the flowers after the dew. And may our hearts be glad, looking heavenward to-day, in its promises, and in our holy hopes and expectations.

And grant, we pray thee, that thy blessing may rest upon the Churches that are gathered together to-day everywhere, and upon those that shall preach thy gospel. May every one have more and more light. Increase to-day more and more earnestness and fidelity. And make the knowledge of Jesus Christ to spread abroad. And make the power of his name to be felt, so that justice shall grow stronger; so that there shall be more intelligence and less ignorance; so that men shall grow humane and kind, one to another; so that civilization shall be full of Christ; and so that all this nation, and all the nations of the earth shall at last see thy salvation.

And to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit shall be praises evermore. *Amen.*

PRAYER AFTER THE SERMON.

Our Father, we pray that thou wilt bless the word which has been spoken, to the consideration of every one. Help dying souls. Help the children that have no parents to pray for them. Help the young that have drifted away from the restraints and guardianship of home. Help those that are in the midst of life, and fixed fast in habits which they know not how to break. Help the advanced who are beginning to feel the infirmities of age. Oh! grant that every pain may be as the voice of a prophet saying to them, *Prepare!* Grant that every sign of weakness may say to them, *Prepare!* May they see messengers, one and another, all the way along the road which they travel, growing thicker every day, and more loud-voiced, saying to them, Be ready! Prepare to meet thy God! Lord Jesus, we pray that thou wilt answer the prayers that long have been delayed, and bring in at last the reluctant. Win them and wear them in thine everlasting glory. And to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit shall be praises evermore. *Amen.*

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